

*Political unity  
and linguistic diversity in Europe* \*

TRADITIONAL ideas of an exclusive, nearly hermetical state sovereignty could never offer much more than a very rough, often thoroughly mystifying approach to the real world of politics. Historically, one finds many examples of strong external as well as internal opposition against the concentration of political power within the institutional framework of the nation-state. Still, nobody would doubt that the consolidation of national forms of rule has been one of the most salient features of modern European history (1).

Apparently, however, the picture has changed during the last decades. The future of the European nation-state seems to have become more uncertain than ever before. The autonomy of national political actors is declining steadily in the areas of economic and social governance; at the same time, European societies are becoming a more and more complex patchwork of different—sometimes overlapping, sometimes colliding—cultural identities. From the sociological and cultural point of view, classical concepts such as the people, nationality or citizenship have to be combined with new concepts and realities, e.g. integration, acculturation, assimilation, syncretism, pluralism or multiculturalism. From the point of view of law and politics, the traditional principle of sovereignty has been detached from its original frame of reference. Is there a single sovereign state in contemporary Europe which can convincingly claim to exercise exclusive powers over its territory and its population?

Traditional state dominance in European transnational relations is giving way to a more heterogeneous pattern of political interactions, a

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(1) Seminal accounts of the process of nation-state formation in Europe have been given by Deutsch (1966), Hobsbawm (1990), Rokkan (1970, 1975) and Tilly (1990).

pattern displaying clear tendencies toward segmentation along functional, territorial and cultural lines. State diplomacy is supplemented by new forms of 'paradiplomatic' activities, whose subjects are no longer nation-states but supranational bodies, transnational corporations, regions, border areas or cultural groups (2). At the same time, the European dimension has become a very important factor especially in the field of economic and social policies, even if these are still mainly designed and implemented at the level of single states; here, the choice of political alternatives in the national arena is clearly being more and more heavily affected by the external imperatives set down, for instance, in the Single European Act or in the Maastricht treaty. Can new forms of cultural, social and political integration transcending the nation-state be conceived against this background as a possible outcome of the institutionalization of a European polity?

In his comparative political sociology of modern Europe, Stein Rokkan (1975), attempting to offer a synthetic view of a complex and differentiated set of historical tendencies, distinguished four sequences in the political development through which nation-states in the Western half of the continent came to be consolidated: 1) penetration of a territory by a political centre (state-building); 2) cultural standardization of this territory (nation-building); 3) extension of citizens' rights to political participation (democratization); and 4) political redistribution of economic resources (creation of welfare state systems). From the present perspective, it seems quite evident that European integration will not follow this traditional path of political unification, but we still lack the conceptual tools needed in order to be able to determine the kind of polity emerging at the transnational level of the European Union. For the time being, the safest way of classifying the EU is to consider it to be a novel form of political domination (Schmitter 1991), which combines different spheres of governance with different logics of political decision-making. Obviously, national policies are shaped by European directives only in varying degrees. While some policy areas (e.g. agriculture) are highly sensitive to transnational norms, other areas (e.g. foreign relations) seem to remain fairly unaffected by the guidelines stipulated in the context of European governing bodies, such as the Com-

(2) Let me just mention an example of this kind of tendency picked arbitrarily from the newspapers in February 1999: the Parliament of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country in Spain, which has a nationalist majority, passed a resolution inviting the Kurdish *Assembly* in exile to hold a session under the institutional auspices of the Basque represen-

tative chamber. This invitation by a semi-sovereign political body immediately provoked the openly hostile reaction of the Spanish government, which made clear it would try to obstruct the 'official' visit of the Kurds to territory still located within Spanish state borders; see *El País*, 13 February 1999.

mission or the Council of Ministers. Nevertheless, the general trend points to a successive Europeanization of an ever-growing number of national policies.

This development raises a serious dilemma: to what extent can the Europeanization of policies be maintained and justified without intensifying corresponding developments in the domains of politics and of the polity? The general dilemma underlies a series of important issues in the current debate on the future of Europe, such as the democratic deficit of the EU, the lack of a European public sphere, the shaky foundations of a common European identity and, finally, the difficulties facing any attempt to set up a comprehensive European frame for political communication not tied to national and linguistic frontiers, to mention just a few topics my paper will touch upon. Put in a nutshell, these issues are closely connected to one central problem: the advances achieved in integrating sectoral policies and in extending fields of political regulation across European states are not matched by parallel processes that ought to give the European Union a higher degree of politico-cultural cohesion. Up to now, questions of 'cultural politics' (3) have not been of much concern in the process of developing European institutions. The political dynamics related to the articulation of cultural identities, to collective struggles for official recognition and representation and to the interplay of sociocultural group differentiation with the public definition of common civic bonds, have only received scant attention.

What are the requisites and consequences of European polity-building at the level of cultural politics? At first sight, it might be tempting to look at previous experiences of political integration under conditions of cultural pluralism in order to figure out possible futures for the EU. In this respect, the crucial link between nation-states and democracy in the Western world has certainly been established by the status of citizenship, based on a common collective identity from which a set of individual rights and obligations is derived. Thus it seems unlikely that the convergence of the civil, political and social rights of EU citizens can proceed steadily if there is no shared cultural space for transnational public communication on the purposes and the direction of such a process (4). In contrast with the precedent patterns of state building, however, the present situation offers no reason to believe that

(3) I borrow this concept from Jordan and Weedon (1995).

(4) Modernization theorists have stressed that the integration of modern societies was contingent upon the development of operative

communication structures; the process of creating such structures has been interpreted as standardization (Rokkan), mobilization (Deutsch) or functional homogenization (Gellner).

in the European context this common space could be the result of a unilateral imposition by a dominant political centre; if at all, it will develop as the outcome of a multilateral consensus, setting the foundations of a political community that will not be homogeneous and probably not even united, but will rather remain a complex mosaic of different cultural identities with cross-cutting political loyalties.

Language pluralism certainly constitutes one of the main configurative elements of cultural heterogeneity in the EU. In this sense, it is perhaps justifiable that this paper focuses on the role played by language in the broader field of cultural diversity. There are good reasons to believe that European polity-building cannot remain indefinitely disconnected from the establishment of a transnational public sphere, which itself must lean on a generalized communication potential. On the other hand, cultural standardization in the EU will not be realized by putting major restrictions on multilingualism. How is this dilemma tackled at the level of European institutions? Are there any signs indicating a Europeanization of language policies that might reduce traditional homogenizing prerogatives of the idealized nation-state? In which ways could the political regulation of language issues in the EU take up the examples of other multilingual polities, and in which ways will it require specific arrangements?

Before going into these problems, I will make a few remarks on the relevance of the heterogeneous and multilingual shape of the EU in view of the attempts at democratizing this new kind of polity. I continue with a very brief look at previous experiences of language policies pursued by West European nation-states. Then I turn to the thorny questions raised by language pluralism in the present context of the EU. In the last section of the paper, I will try to assess the consequences of the EU's markedly heterogeneous profile for the project of building a political community that is able to overcome the cultural rigidities typical of the dominant nation-state model.

### 1. *Democratic integration in a heterogeneous polity*

In many respects, the present stage of European integration can be characterized by the problems related to the 'democratic deficit' of an emerging transnational polity. The impact of European decision-making at the national, regional and local level of member states is getting continuously stronger, but the institutional frame in which such

decisions are taken lacks democratic legitimacy. The effects of European policies become more and more patent all over the Union's territory, whereas European politics still seem to take place in half-hidden arenas, and the constitutional architecture of a European polity is difficult to discern at all. The steady extension of the 'acquis communautaire' has not been accompanied by comparable progress in the democratization of European institutions. The difficulties associated with the project of developing a democratic transnational polity have been the object of many analyses in recent years (5). A recurrent motive of such analyses has been to point at the weak cultural foundations of a European identity which would give political cohesion to a transnational community of citizens. Thus one is reminded of Jean Monnet's statement: 'if we had to do it again, I would begin with culture' (6). Indeed, a position often heard in the current debate on the future of Europe is that the pronounced cultural heterogeneity within the EU inhibits the formation and articulation of a common political identity among Europeans.

In the German context, Dieter Grimm, as an expert in constitutional law and a member of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, can be considered a representative and prominent exponent of such a view. In a noteworthy contribution to the discussion turning around the political direction of the integration process after Maastricht, he takes the lack of democratic legitimacy in the political construction of Europe as a point of departure for an analysis aiming at the clarification of the options available in order to find a way out of the EU's democratic impasse (Grimm 1995). In this respect, he is not too optimistic. From his perspective, the prospects of establishing a foundational political consensus in Europe that transcends the nation-state level are contingent upon requisites beyond the reach of constitutional deliberations. According to Grimm, plans elaborated with the intention of enhancing the democratic integration of the EU are bound to remain irrelevant, as long as there are no real opportunities for cultural integration across national borders. The constitutional lawyer is particularly skeptical about the chances of establishing a European community of participation without having previously created a European community of communication. In order to stress this point, he uses a straightforward argumentation line: there can be no European democracy because there is no European public sphere; there can be no European public sphere because there is no European people (in the sense of a *demos* possessing a collective

(5) For a compact overview of the debates on Europe's democratic deficit *cf.* Abromeit 1998.

(6) Cited in Berting (1997: 413).

identity that would serve as a frame for political unity); and there can be no European people because there is no common European language. From this angle, language differentiation is seen as one of the major features of cultural pluralism in Europe. The latter is considered to be a factor obstructing the formation of intermediary political structures so seriously that, at this moment, any attempt to delimit the proper institutional space for a truly European democracy seems doomed to failure. Providing the idea of a European demos with concrete contents would require a sociocultural underpinning not in sight at present.

Grimm's reasoning should not be hastily dismissed as an additional manifestation of the long-lasting influence of ethnocultural traditions on political thought in Germany. Leaning on such traditions would, then, easily lead to an exaggeration of the problems that heterogeneity implies for the establishment of democratic rule. But this is not the case. The reflections just summarized remain firmly rooted in the broader domain of modern democratic theory and rely on an assumption frequently made, although not always in explicit terms, namely that the cohesion of a political community based upon consent requires a certain degree of homogeneity in the realms of language and culture. By restating this argument, Grimm does not pull out of the liberal-democratic mainstream (7). Let us go back to the classics and have a brief look at one of the seminal texts of modern liberal thought. In his *Considerations on Representative Government*, John Stuart Mill (1958 [1861]: 230) writes:

Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. The influences which form opinions and decide political acts are different in the different sections of the country.

In Mill's opinion, the prospects of sustaining a democratic polity are contingent upon the degree of national and linguistic unification previously attained within the territory of a given state. For the English philosopher and politician, a collectively experienced 'fellow-feeling' constitutes a substantial requisite for the successful development of representative forms of rule. His view relies on the assumption that a liberal democracy will only be able to cope with situations of intense democratic conflict as long as its citizens have common ties in the basic patterns of their identity, symbolized by language and culture. Being the

(7) That this mainstream has tended to confound cultural neutrality (or 'benign neglect') with the—at least implicit—support of a particular (majority) culture may well turn out to be one of the main conclusions of a

lively debate in political theory during the last decade; cf. the pivotal contributions of Kymlicka (1995) and Tully (1995) to a normative assessment of the consequences of cultural diversity for democratic politics.

foundation of state unity, the nation becomes, at the same time, the principal source of democratic legitimation. Thus a close connection is established between state theory and democratic theory, as the scope of processes of democratic deliberation and decision-making coincides with the domain of rule by the nation-state. Indeed, the standard version of state theories formulated in the European tradition postulates that a state should have a uniform identity, a single source of sovereignty and a unitary conception of citizens' rights and obligations, presupposing a society that is culturally homogeneous (Parekh 1997: 192).

Postulates of this kind have reappeared with force in recent debates on the political dimensions of European integration. Those voices advocating the virtues of a popular sovereignty that expresses the essential features of a culturally based community, and that supports a uniform set of public institutions, are overtly reluctant to exchange the—apparently—safe enclosure of nation-state identities for the uncertain construction of a supranational polity. Interestingly enough, a frequent point of departure for analyses of the perspectives of European polity-building that offer a thoroughly skeptical view of the EU's democratic potentialities is an abstract, reifying and to a large extent even idealizing model of the nation-state. With such an image in mind, one can hardly avoid giving a categorical and one-sided account of the effects cultural diversity or language pluralism has on the political scene.

Viewed in this light, there is a striking contradiction in Grimm's argumentation: the historically and politically well-informed expert in constitutional law denies that the experiences of multilingual European states such as Belgium, Finland or Switzerland could contribute to an adequate understanding of the situation in the EU, where the degree of language differentiation obviously is substantially higher. The next step in his reasoning is to affirm that a country like Switzerland had already developed a national identity, which now serves as the frame for its multilingual political discourse, long before constitutionalization (Grimm 1995: 295-296). What remains unexplained and difficult to understand, then, is how an encompassing collective identity could emerge in the Swiss case, if the corresponding linguistic foundations were lacking, as seems to be the case in present day Europe. Without any doubt, Grimm raises important questions concerning the sociocultural bases of the European integration process. Nevertheless, the tribute his approach pays to the concept of the reified nation-state seems excessively high. After all, the concept does not adjust in an adequate way to the variety of forms of cultural integration in the nation-state discernable across Europe: nation-states have not developed along the

same lines all over the continent. The levels of national integration achieved by state institutions vary profoundly from country to country. In this sense, I prefer taking an alternative path when focusing on the political consequences of cultural diversity and language pluralism. In the rough sketch that follows, I will try to offer a simple heuristic overview of the complex field of European language policies that remains open for some significant variations on the empirical terrain.

## *2. Language policies in European nation-states*

In the world of contemporary Western democracies, holding on to the assumption that political integration requires a 'fellow-feeling' grounded on common cultural identity would involve serious dilemmas. After the transition to a liberal-democratic type of political regime, homogeneity can hardly be enforced against the will of groups defined as heterogeneous without violating fundamental rights. The 'solution' to this problem offered by democratic theory has often simply consisted in taking for granted that a minimum cultural homogeneity is 'already there', having previously been created within the institutional context of a nation-state. A normative discussion of the historical background of national unification is generally avoided (Dahl 1989: 209). As far as the problems of language diversity are of any concern from such a perspective, the process of 'language rationalization' (Laitin 1992: 9) in the democratic nation-state is considered to be basically concluded. What does language rationalization mean here? The concept refers to the measures a political centre aiming at efficient forms of rule and administration has undertaken in order to impose the hegemony of a common language over the territory of the state. In this sense, language rationalization proves to be an important element in the developments underlying the formation of nation-states in Europe, in addition to the processes of bureaucratic and economic rationalization extensively analyzed by Max Weber.

The tendency to establish monolingual structures for communication between public authorities and 'the people' actually seems to have predominated in the building of the larger European territorial and national states. Nevertheless, there are remarkable differences from country to country regarding the impact of these tendencies. France may be considered to be the paradigmatic example of a state whose policies have pushed for language standardization. As Eugen Weber has shown in his



well-known study *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), from the second half of the 19th century onward the French state made deliberate use of compulsory schooling and conscription as institutional tools for disseminating uniform cultural identity patterns within the population. Political unity is not compatible with the plurality of languages and cultures in the French republican state. As Jean-Marc Ferry (1994: 34-35) puts it sharply, in France the political category of 'integration' has always worn a uniform (be it in the colour of military or in the colour of school clothing, one may add). A close interlocking of republicanism and the goal of maintaining a culturally uniform public sphere has remained a dominant feature of French politics until today. France has not signed the European charter on regional and minority languages so far and is also the only EU member state referring explicitly to one official language in its constitution, not mentioning the other languages present on its territory (Birnbaum 1998: 355).

The historical experiences of France, as well as those of other larger territorial states in Europe, however, can't be generalized without reservations. It is misleading to suppose that there has been one standard European model for the organization of rule by the nation-state (Ebbinghaus and Kraus 1997: 339-344). The differences between single paths of state formation become quite patent if one looks at the degree of congruence in political and cultural integration patterns. It is true that especially those European national polities succeeding the larger absolutist states have made the attempt to combine the goals of territorial integration and of cultural homogeneity when applying the principle of sovereignty within their domain of rule. Yet taking into account its long-term results, the success story of the European nation-state remains to a great extent a myth (Tilly 1992), even if in some cases the attempts at homogenization were really far-reaching. A monopoly of centralized state control in the realms of language and culture was especially hard to establish in those countries having experienced only a limited 'nationalization' of particular collective identities before entering the period of modern mass politics. In these cases, the institutional negation of pluralism by the state would arouse the protest of already mobilized ethno-linguistic groups (8).

European paths of state building have produced different levels of cultural standardization and language rationalization. The political guideline *cuius regio, eius religio* as well as its natural companion *cuius regio, eius lingua* were not uncontested principles in the making of the

(8) As can be shown following Stein Rokkan's account of nation-state formation in modern Europe; cf. Rokkan (1975), Rokkan and Urwin (1983).

European state system. Hence, there is a high degree of variation in the interplay of language (or languages) and political public sphere (or political public spheres) in West European nation-states. Focusing exclusively on the member states of the EU, the range of constellations to be found at present in the field of language policy stretches from state monolingualism by and large corresponding to the sociolinguistic reality of a country (Portugal) to the generalized bilingualism of public institutions (Finland).

Depending on the specific political context, the principle of territoriality and the principle of personality can be used as the elementary instruments for the institutional regulation of language pluralism. At the same time, language rights can be granted according to either rather restrictive or rather generous criteria (9). To the extent that there is any official recognition of linguistic heterogeneity, one obtains a simple typology of the language policies implemented by European states by combining the principle of recognition with the functional scope of the recognition (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1

*The political recognition of multilingualism in West European states*

*  functional scope of recognition	<i>principle of recognition</i> *	personal	territorial
	*		
partial		I. provisions protecting members of linguistic minorities	II. linguistic autonomy
unrestricted		IV. institutional bilingualism	III. linguistic federalism

(9) A detailed description of language policies in Western Europe is given by Siguan (1995: 59-91).

Provisions protecting the members of language communities (I) are an option chosen particularly in settings where the targeted groups have become a minority even in their traditional core areas of settlement. An example of this kind are the Sorbs in the German states of Saxony and Brandenburg. This group of Slavic descent enjoys special cultural rights; they are guaranteed by the corresponding state constitutions and implemented on the local level, in the educative and administrative realms, and can be conceived of as a partial and essentially symbolic compensation for the strong pressures toward assimilating into the German-speaking majority the Sorbian minority faces. Applied within a limited portion of a state's territory, linguistic autonomy (II) ensures the formal equality of minority and majority languages: both Catalan in Catalonia and German in South Tyrol, for instance, share official status together with the respective state languages, i.e. Spanish or Italian. The official equality remains, however, exclusively restricted to the regional context. In opposition to this, linguistic federalism (III) accepts and recognizes several languages as state languages: this is the status Dutch, French and German have in Belgium, or German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic have in Switzerland. Still, as has to be kept in mind, the consequent application of the principle of territoriality in cases like these generally implies that the state is subdivided in political and administrative units which, according to the officially adopted criteria, are classified as largely homogeneous with regard to language (10). Finally, institutional multilingualism (IV) does not restrict, in principle, the official use of different languages by subjecting it to territorial imperatives: thus in countries like Finland or Ireland, the public administration is committed to safeguarding the equal status of two state languages (Finnish and Swedish in the first, Irish and English in the second case).

In order to figure out plausible political scenarios for the EU, it would certainly be helpful to have the possibility of confronting more detailed comparative evidence on the interrelations between public sphere and democracy in strongly multilingual states. At first sight, one may at least presume, it does not seem too probable that European democracies paying an official tribute to multilingualism would suffer from a far-reaching fragmentation of public discourses or would even have to live with a permanent malfunctioning of their structures that should enable

(10) Brussels, having been defined as a bilingual region within the Belgian state, is an evident exception; Hartig (1985: 73-74) as well as Nelde and Weber (1995: 93-94) can be

consulted for a quick glance at the difficult coexistence of the language groups in Belgium's capital.

overarching processes of political communication. There can be no doubt that language diversity, being an especially salient manifestation of cultural heterogeneity, does alter the framework in which democratic politics take place in a substantial way. But this does not mean that one has to agree with the approach put forward by Mill or by Grimm and regard a unitary culture grounded on language as an indispensable pillar of a democratic political order. Of course, it would be pretty short-sighted to ignore that linguistic and cultural diversity involves real challenges for the institutional mechanics and the public's deliberative capacities (11) in all types of polity supposed to meet democratic standards. Such challenges, however, should not be automatically equated with unsurmountable obstacles for building transnational democratic structures in a heterogeneous Europe.

### *3. The language issue in the EU*

At present, the EU has 15 member states. According to linguistic criteria, more than 30 autochthonous languages are spoken in these states (Haarmann 1993). The variation in the size of the respective language communities is extraordinarily high: on the one hand, there is the example of German, with its approximately 90 million native speakers in the Union's territory; on the other hand, one comes upon small language islands as those constituted by Sorbian (60,000 speakers) or by Sami (about 20,000 speakers in Sweden and Finland; furthermore, there are 25,000 indigenous speakers of this Finno-Ugric language in Norway, outside the EU's actual territory). In the 15 states of the EU, 13 languages are state languages (German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Greek, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Irish and Luxembourgian). In addition to them, we find 6 languages with official status at the regional level (Catalan, Galician, Basque, Welsh, Frisian and Sami) (12); several other minority languages get some kind of official protection (e.g. Sorbian in Germany or Slovene and Croatian in Austria).

(11) In his introduction to the new edition of his classical study, Habermas (1990: 33-44) emphasizes the role of the public sphere as the genuine 'site' of processes of democratic deliberation.

(12) The West European state languages simultaneously enjoying some official or semiofficial status outside their 'own' national borders (as German in South Tyrol) are not included here.

Hence, it is more than obvious that language diversity has to be considered as one of the main characteristics of Europe's cultural profile. This diversity would become even more salient after taking a glance at the Eastern half of the subcontinent. The important point in the context discussed here, however, is not language diversity as such. What really matters are the political implications of the European Babel. They result from the heavy historical weight of language nationalism in the formation and consolidation processes of modern states on the continent (Coulmas 1985: 41-58). Language is a highly significant issue in European politics. This observation applies not only to nations based upon common ethnic or cultural ties, but also to state nations. In both cases, the language factor played a very prominent role in the context of political integration. In cultural nations, the shared 'primordial' bond of language has been used as one of the most elementary points of reference for the political definition of collective identities. In so-called state nations, on the other hand, the political and administrative elites often have deliberately strived for the linguistic standardization of the whole public sphere. The effects of the two orientations have not been too dissimilar in the area of language policies. It is probably no coincidence that only three of the 15 EU member states—Great Britain, Austria and Belgium—bear names which can't be automatically associated with a (national) language.

How do the European institutions deal with the language question, which must definitely be seen as a highly delicate one because of the persistently strong links between linguistic and national identities? The Treaty of Rome (1957) remained very careful when touching upon the issue, only declaring in Article 217 that language matters concerning the organs of the Community shall be resolved unanimously by the Council. Article 1 of the corresponding Council Regulation determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community (EEC), adopted in 1958, reads: 'The official languages and the working languages of the institutions of the Community shall be Dutch, French, German and Italian' (13). The basic pattern of the institutional language regime for an integrating Western Europe is outlined in this article. Since the constitution of the EEC, an official commitment to a multilingual consensus has served as the normative base for tackling the question of language in the domain of Community organs. The addition of state languages has been the prevailing guideline each time new members were admitted. *De jure*, the official language regime conceived

(13) As cited in Coulmas (1991a: 38); the additional articles of the Regulation can also be found there.

for the European institutions does not draw a clear distinction between official languages and working languages. Nonetheless, the internal communication of the Commission and of the EU's administrative bodies is governed by more 'pragmatic' *de facto* arrangements, that will briefly be referred to further below in this article. In order to grasp the 'philosophy' underlying the development of European institutions in matters of language policy, it is worth quoting Walter Hallstein, the Commission's first President, who affirmed in 1974:

That the Europeans do not speak the same language cannot disturb us. Switzerland provides the classical example of the fact that linguistic variety rather than being a limitation is an enrichment, and we hope that our Belgian friends can soon be cited as another example. Multiplicity of languages is no obstacle but an incentive. This is demonstrated by our European officials in Brussels and in the joint research centres of Euratom (14).

Up to now, the principle of equality of state languages has been maintained by EU institutions without major revisions. Irish and Luxembourgian have a special status as official, but not current working languages. In a similar way, Catalan, as a regional, non-state language, has obtained some recognition on a mainly symbolic level through a Resolution voted by the European Parliament in 1990 (15). Yet this well-intentioned step with its rather limited impact does not imply a deeper change of a situation that remains contradictory from a normative perspective: it is difficult to understand why, in the institutional context of Europe, a regional language such as Catalan, with about 7 million speakers, should have a second class position in comparison to state languages such as Danish (5 million) or Swedish (approx. 8 million speakers) (16). After Sweden's and Finland's membership, the number of fully official languages in the EU has increased from 9 to 11; at the same time, the combinations to be covered by the translation and interpreting services have increased more dramatically from 72 to 110 (Siguan 1995: 167).

This pronounced multilingualism is precisely an element offering a sharp point of contrast between the EU and international organizations of a more traditional kind, guided by far less complex communicative standards. The EFTA uses English as its only working language. The Council of Europe has English and French as its official languages; additionally, German and Italian are accepted as working languages. In the UN, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese share

(14) Quoted in Coulmas (1991a: 28, note 1).

(15) Colomines (1992: 153-160) informs about the political background conditions of this measure.

(16) Figures given according to Haarmann (1993: 57, 62, 66).

the status of official languages, the *de facto* working languages within the organizational apparatus being English and French (17). It seems evident that the multilingual shape of the EU has a politically very important symbolic component: with its highly specific and ambitious language regime, the Union emphasizes the political claim to be substantially 'more' than just another international organization. The system of integral multilingualism has been conceived in order to meet a purpose that may even be considered to be 'democratic' by origin, namely that the results of collective decision-making in the European polity are accessible to all European citizens in a language they are familiar with.

What are the administrative costs of the EU's official language arrangements? One may be inclined to suspect that the 'linguistic management' of European integration consumes vast amounts of money. According to Coulmas (1991a: 23), about 40% of the administrative budget the Europe of the Twelve had at its disposal were directed at financing institutional multilingualism. The proportions vary for the different Community organs: for the Commission, 'language spending' amounted to approximately 30% of the total administrative expenditures, reaching a level of about 60% for the Council and for the Parliament. At first sight, these numbers look fairly high, but it has to be taken into account that the total of sums which the EC spent in order to cover its own administrative activities was relatively low. Consequently, around 1990 the costs raised by multilingualism in the Community organs did not add up to much more than 2% of the whole EC budget (Coulmas 1991b: 30-31; Gerhards 1993: 103, note 19). For this reason, it is not surprising that in 1982 the European Parliament could still pass a resolution stressing that the equal treatment of all official languages should remain an absolute priority over all kind of financial criteria. Nevertheless, at present it may be much less easy to determine if such a position can be maintained without major qualifications in the course of the successive enlargements of the EC/EU.

So far, the language question in the European Union remains an open one. While the general parameters of a European language policy have remained diffuse, the procedures designed to regulate linguistic pluralism are not free of contradictions. This vagueness and inconsistency matches well with the overall political form of the EU, difficult to grasp in more than one respect. To begin with, there is a consequent commitment to the cause of European multilingualism, which is seen as an essential part of a common cultural legacy. Typically EU organs, such as

(17) I am drawing from the overviews in Coulmas (1991b: 25-26) and Siguan (1995: 169).

the Commission or the Parliament, do not even restrict this commitment to the domain of official state languages, but are apparently prepared to extend it, albeit cautiously, to minority languages as well: the Commission has provided the European Bureau for Minority Languages, created in Dublin 1982, with some material support (De Witte 1993: 169), while the European Parliament has expressed concern for the protection of cultural and linguistic minorities in several of its resolutions. At the same time, however, it is beyond any doubt that the principle of 'integral multilingualism' is basically a concession made to the tradition of the national languages—in the narrow sense of nation-state languages—in the project of uniting Europe. Therefore, it would not be plausible at all to speak of a European language policy designed to undermine the sovereignty of nation-states. Finally, the internal communication routines of Europe's political and administrative bodies do not allow for a rigid application of the principle of official language equality. Thus it is no secret that the Commission uses French and recently more and more often also English as its *de facto* working languages (Calvet 1993: 189-192). This does not mean, however, that there were explicit norms for the *de facto* use of two—or occasionally three, if one wants to add German, which has seen its position somewhat enhanced, since Austria became an EU member—main languages in the administrative communication within EU organs.

The principal obstacle in attempting to specify norms of this kind, elaborated in order to pave the way for a transition from 'integral' to limited multilingualism in the EU's institutional framework, is not difficult to discern: the consensus required to reach a general political agreement upon a 'language rationalization' program for an 'ever closer Union' of Europeans lacks political foundations. The open institutionalization of language status inequalities, resulting from the systematic promotion of one or two major transnational *linguae francae* at the expense of the remaining European state languages, does not look like an attractive proposal for debate in the EU at this moment. As a matter of fact, recent European programs set up in the field of language policies, such as LINGUA, have been intended to point in a rather different direction. They have given strong support to an extensive multilingualism deliberately including the minor state languages.

Even if they are not native speakers, many members of the European Parliament can probably be regarded as thoroughly fluent in the English language. Yet, a significant number of them also continue to use the interpreter services and put on their headphones when speeches in the all-European Chamber are held in English. This, of course, is an arbi-



trarily chosen example. Yet it may still help to illustrate the persistent appeal of the idea of the national language in the context of European integration. In general, one might add, the very terrain of political discourse is especially prone to conflicts between the expressive and the instrumental functions of language(s). On such a ground, affirming and reproducing a particular collective identity may well turn out to be a goal conducive to the narrowing of the channels supposed to be at disposal for intercultural communication.

*4. European futures: between a speechless public sphere  
and a multiplicity of civic tongues*

Europeans will continue speaking in different tongues. For the foreseeable future, linguistic diversity should remain one of Europe's most characteristic cultural features. The language patchwork might even become more differentiated and diverse, as more and more languages of immigrant communities are joining the universe of the autochthonous—be they national or regional—European languages. At the present stage, it is an open question to what extent tendencies towards linguistic assimilation will continue to predominate in the case of migrant groups. In view of the apparently well-entrenched position Turkish has in Germany or Arabic has in France, the trend may be that new varieties of multilingualism emerge. Modern telecommunication systems have enormously increased the possibilities for maintaining group identities on a nonterritorial basis. As it develops into an informational society, Europe offers fertile soil for the organization of 'virtual ethnic communities' (Elkins 1997). Although the Internet is certainly contributing to a further strengthening of the global hegemony of English, it also seems to be simultaneously enhancing the survival capacity of smaller language groups who are able to expand their communicative networks well beyond their traditional range. In a similar way, it seems highly plausible that the growing intensification of interaction within collectivities dispersed across state borders and world regions is giving a dynamic meaning to the figure of the 'long-distance nationalist' (Anderson 1992: 12); just think of the recent mobilization of the Tamils living in Australia or of the Kurds in Germany. Against this kind of background, the differentiation of the European population along linguistic and cultural lines is not likely to retrocede. From the point of view of sociolinguistics, the arena of language policies in Europe will probably become even more complex than it is at present.

Without any doubt, during the last decades English has attained an almost unchallenged position as the leading unofficial *lingua franca* in Europe (18). Nonetheless, it should not be expected that the *de facto* dominance of the English language between the Atlantic and the Urals will soon get an official character by acknowledgement of the EU member states. Any initiative pointing in this direction would meet with all kinds of resistance. At the present stage, a political program aiming at achieving linguistic standardization on a European scale is not an option under serious discussion: in sharp contrast to the historical dynamics underlying the formation of nation-states, there is no institutional centre of power which could push for the realization of such a program. But even if such a centre came into being—one may think of the Commission in Brussels having been assigned drastically enlarged competences—and started to propagate the linguistic unification of Europe, the goal pursued would certainly remain out of actual institutional reach in view of the expectable massive protest of political and cultural elites as well as of large parts of the population, who would consider the common European language to be an exoglossic standard.

However, the observation that standardization measures are impossible to realize does not render the language question in the context of European integration obsolete. The dilemma a uniting Europe has to confront, as long as the current regulations concerning language are not changed, is that, on the one hand, the elasticity of administrative multilingualism seems to have arrived at its limits; but, on the other hand, feasible solutions in the sphere of a language policy for the EU are not in sight. To what extent could this impasse play a role in the negotiations on the Eastern enlargement of the Union? The states under scrutiny for admission represent a sample in which the relatively small languages predominate; giving these languages official status in the institutional framework of the EU would imply a dramatic increase in the combinations needing to be accounted for in operations of translating and interpreting (19). Under normative aspects, there are hardly any convincing arguments for relegating new members of the Union to a second class status in the official European language system. The question, then, seems to be whether the ongoing debates on the institutional reform of the EU will be consequential in the sphere of language policy too and will trigger off negotiations about a new type of language

(18) De Swaan (1993: 249-252) presents detailed figures showing that currently no other language can rival with the communication potential offered by English on the Continent.

(19) If Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia became EU members, the number of official languages would rise to 16; this would produce 240 language pairs to be covered by the translation services.

regime. Up to now, even the most hesitant attempts to restrain the principle of equality for all official languages have not brought about practical results. The truth is that any hypothetical proposal to modify inherited rules, breaking with 'official officialism' in order to settle the European language question proves to be highly controversial.

As already pointed out before, plans to concede a single state language the privilege of becoming the institutionally sanctioned vehicle for trans-European communication—English being the obvious first candidate—are bound to fail due to their limited political persuasiveness. From the point of view of fairness, perhaps the most elegant solution to Europe's communicative problems would consist in giving support to a common language as neutral as possible. Several options can be taken into consideration according to the criterium of impartiality. One possible choice is Latin. As it functioned for centuries as a European *lingua franca* par excellence, one may wish to reactivate its traditional communicative mission. Indeed, this kind of approach was adopted by the members of the European Parliament Patijn and Van der Hek in a proposal addressed to the Commission in 1974. On a similar line, Esperanto or other artificial languages could be regarded as potential tools for creating a shared space of communication in Europe (20). Finally, there is the remote scenario of a political agreement in favour of a small and genuinely marginal European language, that should not even belong to one of the more important language families, as otherwise maximal neutrality would not be guaranteed. Although suggestions of this sort might in the end be less absurd than they appear at first sight, it is pretty evident that their political relevance is at best a theoretical one.

There is still another possibility: reducing institutional multilingualism to a manageable quantity of languages; let us assume that the corresponding outcome would lie somewhere between two and five. Taking such a step, that obviously presupposes major political changes not only at the symbolic level, implies a partial language rationalization fostering 'selective multilingualism' (Haarmann 1991). The potential beneficiaries of such an arrangement would be, again and of course, English, additionally French and German, perhaps also Spanish as well as Italian (21). Although having the character of a compromise, selective multilingualism does not look like a recipe for avoiding political fric-

(20) Jukka Ukkola (1997) turns to this idea in an ironic short piece written for the Finnish weekly magazine 'Suomen Kuvalehti'. He describes how the European Monetary Union is followed by the European Language Union. Its communicative medium—called *Das*

*Linguaque*—is constituted by elements taken proportionally from the different state languages.

(21) Possible selection criteria from the point of view of linguistics are discussed by Haarmann (1991) and Hagège (1992).

tions. The main problem related to it is how to reach a consensus about a reasonably low number of working languages. Drawing up a fair selection procedure will hardly be possible without offering substantial political compensations to those states not entitled to full linguistic representation (22).

It should be stressed that the considerations sketched out in the last paragraphs have only been devoted to the question of language use *within* European institutions. Apparently, to set up rules restricting institutional multilingualism in order to reach a higher degree of 'language rationalization' in that specific context seems difficult enough. Hence, it is difficult to conceive of the systematic transition to a language regime capable of enhancing political communication processes on a general all-European level without losing the support of a majority of the Union's citizens. To what extent does this affect the prospects of a public sphere based upon a cross-national communicative space emerging in Europe?

Replying directly to the pessimistic account Grimm gives regarding the prepolitical foundations available for building a community of European citizens, Habermas (1995) argues against the thesis that a successful process of democratic integration requires relative cultural homogeneity. According to him, the only bond which is ultimately necessary for keeping a heterogeneous society together feeds upon the values of a common *political* culture. Habermas does not really pull out of the liberal-democratic mainstream, as he also maintains that this bond is not just a ubiquitous phenomenon, but has to rely on a functioning and broadly shared public sphere. Yet he denies that some pre-existent cultural substratum is a necessary point of departure for the formation of an integrated public. In the context of European unification, this position comes to mean that the creation of a transnational communicative space is a political aim which can be accomplished through purely institutional efforts. The message emitted has an overt voluntaristic undertone: the communicative space necessary for a European democracy will come into being if the corresponding political and constitutional steps are taken. The issue of linguistic communication is clearly not of central concern in the line of argument developed by Habermas (1995: 307): the language problem is solved by stating

(22) The (extralinguistic) tensions underlying the dilemma described here have recently become quite manifest in the Finnish-German dispute about the necessity of offering interpreting not only into English and French, but also into German at the informal (!) prepara-

tory meetings of the Council of Ministers, and in the reactions of Spain and Italy to the concessions the Finnish Presidency was prepared to make in order to appease the Germans.

almost in passing that English is to become the 'second first language' of Europeans.

My impression is that taking sides with the political voluntarism in which the construction of a European communicative space becomes essentially a matter of consequent institutional design possibly involves one shortcoming: the partial and overdramatizing perspective of a Euro-pessimism resting on culturalist arguments is exchanged for an opposite view which is not unbiased either. From such an angle, the formation of a European community of communication takes place in a cultural context amazingly void of conflict. Yet sociolinguistic evidence shows, by and large, that any multilingual social order denotes a conflict potential between the communities speaking different languages. To what extent this potential is articulated depends significantly on the quality of the concrete political arrangements set up in order to deal with multilingualism (23). Two aspects of the voluntaristic perspective seem to be especially problematic. First, there is a consensual bias stressing the imperatives of communication, that does not take into account the strategic functions of language: as long as humanity remains multilingual, languages will be two-sided tools. They can be used as instruments both for 'inward' communicative integration and for 'outward' communicative closure. More than anything else, political factors do decide which of the two sides is emphasized. Secondly, language is a frequent and recurrent object of 'struggles for recognition' taken up by groups defined by cultural criteria. Examples like Quebec, Catalonia, South Tyrol, the Basque Country or the Brussels Region are showing this again and again. Precisely because of the foreseeable obstructive effects of a 'politics of recognition' (Taylor 1992) taking place on a generalized scale, the possibility that the institutions of the EU could grant official status to English as the single main language of a European polity is an absolutely theoretical and remote one at the present stage. One does not have to be an orthodox supporter of identity politics in order to concede that any decision for one official language is always at the same time a decision against other languages, relegated to a subordinate status. Globalization speaks English, of course, but even so this language is not automatically to be seen as a thoroughly 'neutral' medium for transnational communication.

Apparently, the EU has to confront two double bind situations produced by the interplay of politics and culture in the field of its institu-

(23) See Weinstein (1990) for a broad range of case studies analyzing institutional responses to societal multilingualism.

tional development. Firstly, the growing dominance of English on Europe's sociolinguistic map is steadily pulling down communicative barriers among Europeans, at least at the level of economic, cultural and political elites. Yet at the same time, this *de facto* trend will not be easily translated into a *de jure* reality, as any attempt to concede English an openly privileged official position in the all-European communication network provokes decidedly negative responses by those EU members fearing the political devaluation of their state languages. Hence, one could argue that English is not only part of the solution to Europe's language problem, but also part of the problem itself. The second double bind is closely related to the first one. In the long run, a legitimate and efficient European polity can hardly be conceived of without the supports provided by an extensive public sphere. For this reason, setting the foundations of a common public space should have a high priority among European 'polity-builders'. On the other hand, creating these political foundations will require a minimum cultural consensus—let us use this concept in order to avoid speaking of homogeneity—that is not within easy reach without a public sphere capable of formulating its terms. Therefore, it is no major surprise that Europe's political elites have made no manifest move toward inducing the formation of a (culturally integrated) public sphere 'from above', as this implies opening Pandora's box and might lead to such thoroughly counterproductive outcomes as an anti-European mobilization of national actors (who will, of course, articulate their claims using the argument of cultural differentiation). Putting it even more bluntly: the political support needed for erecting a European public sphere would only be disposable if there were already some rudimentary structures of a broad and active European public.

The two double binds mentioned here are manifestations of a tension that has probably been intrinsic to European integration from the very beginning, even if it has remained latent for a long period: the goal of market integration had to be carefully combined with the respect for cultural difference, especially for the kind of difference embodied in specific nation-state identities. The statement by Walter Hallstein, the European Commission's first President, as quoted above, nicely captures the intention to show a 'multicultural' profile; Europe's official language regime is its most obvious material expression. By now, there is a well-paved institutional path protecting diversity in the EU. It counterbalances the pressures towards cultural 'standardization' that may be derived from political or economic 'imperatives'. Quite obviously, the signposts on this path are multilingual.

The purpose of these remarks is not to suggest that there can be no political public sphere at all in the EU. After all, a pseudo-public doomed to silence and political immaturity, as it lacks a common language for deliberation, is not necessarily the only alternative to a streamlined and culturally uniform all-European public space. Nonetheless, it should have become clear that the issue of Europeanization and language is delicate and highly complex. At the present stage, trying to find a stable equilibrium between the goal of communicative efficiency and the political recognition of cultural diversity looks like a rather hopeless endeavour. One must not forget, however, that the EU is known as a realm of protracted negotiations and sophisticated compromises. From the corresponding point of view, a reasonable way to approach the language issue might be to split up the problem. Basically, this would imply looking for different answers to the question of language, according to the different political and institutional levels to which it is connected.

Here, an important distinction can be made between the internal and the external communication of European institutions. As to the internal dimension, the principle of multilingualism is anyway applied only to a varying extent depending on the institutional locations and their communicative routines. Multilingualism is obviously much more pronounced in the debates of the European Parliament than within the Commission, where the language regime at work is already very selective. Regarding some of its practical aspects, 'official officialism' is more a myth than a reality. In any case, the selection criteria used should become more transparent and subject to an open discussion, if only for reasons of political credibility.

Regulating the field of external communication, including the choice of a language policy for a European public sphere, involves challenges of another and perhaps more dramatic kind. The need for respecting well-entrenched political identities that are deeply embedded in particular cultural and linguistic practices works strongly in favour of linking the European polity to its citizens by the means of integral multilingualism. Still, the ongoing debate on Europe's political future should deliberately pick up the language issue and turn it into a matter of public concern: European citizens have to begin thinking carefully about the 'cultural price' they are willing to pay for being united. Again, sensible approaches will try to avoid any 'all or nothing' constellation by differentiating the problem. Reducing multilingualism in all-European communication to a small number of languages might look less unacceptable for many people if the matters addressed at that level remain

restricted to a few political domains. In this sense, subsidiarity will certainly play a central role in the management of cultural conflicts in the EU: all attempts at standardization realized at the expense of smaller language communities should offer appropriate compensations to the affected groups. The principle of subsidiarity could be given an additional dimension by subdividing Europe's political landscape into clusters of countries, regions and groups sharing some cultural and linguistic affinities. Within such clusters—let us speculate, for instance, about the possibility of creating a 'Latin', a 'Nordic', a 'Teutonic' and an 'Atlantic' network in the present EU—communicative proximity facilitates the practice of passive bilingualism, A and B understanding each other although talking in different languages. Finally, one should consider that coming to terms with multilingualism might generate less tensions if the objective is not to reach an agreement on a single common language, but to define a small set of foreign languages to be covered by European curricula and reflecting some convergence on the communicative interests of Europeans (24).

In sum, the proposal advanced here is to replace 'official officialism' by 'plural pluralism'. In a system of 'plural pluralism', cultural diversity is institutionalized, but to varying degrees and with different implications at different political levels. In the contemporary world, the price for ignoring the growing challenges of cultural pluralism is a loss of political legitimacy. Projecting the functional imperatives of the reified nation-state on Europe's institutional order leads easily in a wrong analytical direction. In a similar way, putting an *a priori* emphasis on the negative effects heterogeneity has for the formation of a European public sphere is a somewhat unconvincing approach to a highly complex situation. The pluralist perspective tries to acknowledge the great political relevance of culture. One of its main assumptions is that ethnic and political cultures cannot be strictly and fundamentally separated from each other in the institutional reality of modern societies (Bader 1997). Thus considering the project of Europeanization in the light of cultural diversity leads to the very conclusion that even a politico-institutional framework designed in order to meet the requirements of culture-blindness will continue requiring linguistic mediation; the choice of the adequate language can hardly be detached from a particular cultural heritage.

(24) Using the evidence provided by formal models, Colomer (1996: 134-136) shows that in multilingual settings comparable to the present EU, the probability that two individuals

belonging to different first language communities share a common second language increases clearly with bilingualism and almost spectacularly with generalized trilingualism.



While paying tribute to the political significance of cultural identities, plural pluralism—called plural precisely because it abstains from praising pluralism as a uniform source for policy recommendations—does not succumb to the temptation of essentializing them. It is directed at breaking up the rigid connection between legitimate ('democratic') forms of rule and the institutionalization of single and exclusive identity patterns that has been typically realized by nation-states. If both the empirical and the normative significance of the principle of national sovereignty are being progressively questioned, there is no substantial reason why the 'one' and homogeneous demos considered to be the source of this sovereignty should not be disaggregated as well. The logical next step would be to recompose or create multiple demoi covering different (functional and territorial) levels of political deliberation. In this context, the speculations about a 'new medievalism' in European politics might indeed carry some weight: single domains of decision-making would be located in a contextually differentiated space not necessarily subject to the control by a 'common will'; at the same time, the central elements of political citizenship would acquire a general transnational character. In the end, a European Union adopting this approach might only need weak cultural foundations in order to construct a solid common civic space.

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